

SPHAEROPHORIA VIRGATA GOELDIN
DE TIEFENAU (DIPTERA: SYRPHIDAE)
IN THE WYRE FOREST, WORCESTERSHIRE,
WITH NOTES ON OTHER SPECIES OF
SPHAEROPHORIA LEPELETIER & SERVILLE
AT THIS LOCALITY

By C. W. PLANT*

Amongst several male *Sphaerophoria* species collected at Hawkbatch Valleys in the Wyre Forest, Worcestershire, on 24 August 1986, were three which keyed to *S. virgata* using Stubbs and Falk (1983) [*British Hoverflies* London: BENHS]. My identifications were most kindly confirmed by Steven Falk, to whom I am most grateful for this favour. This is a new and rather interesting locality for this apparently quite rare hoverfly: Previous records are available for Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire in the south, and for Elgin, Argyllshire, Perthshire, Easternness and Northumberland in the north. Thus, this is not only a new county record, but apparently is also the first away from the two foci for this black and yellow fly.

The flies were captured in three separate sweeps of low growing (about 5 - 10 cms tall) fairly sparse vegetation at the edge of a heathy ride through this Forestry Commission owned part of the Wyre Forest, during one of the few hot sunny days of 1986. Here the ride is about 15 metres wide, the surrounding pines attaining an average height of approximately 4 metres and bordered along the edges of the ride with oak and birch of lesser stature. The ride is bounded by a ditch on one side, which has the outer bank steep and clad with heather and overhanging bracken, amongst other plants. A trickle of water was, and usually is, present in the bottom of the ditch. The flies were captured at a point where there is a slight bend in the ride, and this combined with the height of the trees has created a well lit, warm and sheltered spot in the forest. Whilst it is rarely possible to be precise about details of insects captured by sweeping vegetation, it can certainly be said that the three *S. virgata* were taken from very short vegetation at the edge of the ride, away from the central gravelled area, but certainly not in association with the damp ditch. It would thus appear that, in keeping with existing records from other counties in Britian, *S. virgata* is to be found in heathland type habitats.

Three other species of *Sphaerophoria* are recorded from the Wyre Forest as a whole, and it is interesting that I have taken all three at the same bend of the same ride. By far the commonest member of the genus at this spot in the Forest, (always remembering

*Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, Stratford, London E15 4LZ.

that these comments only apply to males), is *S. batava*, which can be watched feeding on various yellow flower-heads during June, July and August, and is readily swept. There would seem to be relatively little difference between this species and *S. virgata* from the point of view of habitat preference, though in spite of extensive sweeping, coupled with pooting and netting of individual flies, no further examples of *S. virgata* were taken from here or elsewhere in the Forest. *S. batava* was far more numerous here in August than in other months during 1984, 1985 and 1986. One specimen of *batava*, captured on 22 August 1985, had asymmetric genitalia, the lobe on one side being typical, whilst the opposite side had a projection on the inner curve, similar to that found in *S. taeniata*. This latter species is not yet recorded from the Wyre Forest. *S. philanthus* occurs in lesser quantity in this bend of the ride, and appears to have a much earlier peak, being most numerous in June, with only a single example being taken in August. Further, *S. philanthus* is usually found in association with slightly damper areas of the Wyre Forest, and in this particular ride was always taken from the vegetation overhanging the ditch. The normally abundant *S. scripta* also occurs in the ride, but not in such large numbers as it does at other more open sites in the forest, such as the meadow in the Knowles Coppice Reserve. It may be that the vegetation is too sparse at this particular spot, and it is of interest that this short growth should suit the other three species but not this one. Other species of Syrphidae taken on this bend in the ride include *Paragus haemorrhous* (on one occasion only), *Meligramma cincta* (in profusion) and *Sericomyia silentis* (quite common).

Elsewhere in the Wyre Forest as a whole, much of which is, of course, a National Nature Reserve where a permit is needed to collect, *S. batava* and *S. philanthus* are to be found sparingly (?) throughout Hawkbatch Valleys, where there are rides similar to the one described above. *S. batava* alone (so far) is in selected, and seemingly far less suitable, rides in Withybed Wood and around the top end of the Woodlands Caravan Park in Chamberline Wood, both on the Shropshire side of the boundary. They are far less numerous here however and may just be wanderers from the Hawkbatch area across the road. The larger *S. scripta* occurs throughout the entire Forest in suitable habitat, being particularly abundant in the meadows along the Dowles Brook.

As a footnote, may I be permitted to add that, in co-operation with other workers, I am preparing a list of the Syrphidae of the entire Wyre Forest complex, particularly the National Nature Reserve and SSSI areas. Any additional records, past or present, from others who may have visited the site are welcomed.